DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 452 613 EA 031 030

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TITLE Solutions to Securing Qualified Principals.
PUB DATE 2001-05-00
NOTE 15p.
PUB TYPE Reports - Evaluative (142)
EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Accountability; *Administrator Role; Elementary Secondary Education; Higher Education; Labor Market; Meta Analysis; *Occupational Information; Occupational Mobility; *Principals; Professional Development; Public Schools; *Quality of Working Life; *Recruitment; School Districts
IDENTIFIERS *Administrator Supply and Demand; *Principal Shortage

ABSTRACT

There are about 80,000 public school principals in the United States today. The Bureau of Labor Statistics estimates a 10 percent employment increase in educational administration jobs between now and 2008. Numerous articles and studies written on the principal shortage conclude that qualified, experienced principals are getting harder to find, regardless of district quality, pay incentives, location, or size. Nearly 50 percent of the U.S. school districts report having difficulty attracting applicants to fill positions. The turnover rate for principals is in the 40 percent range. High turnover rates create opportunities for new, energetic principals, but new means inexperienced. To encourage principal applicants, districts, universities, and organizations must work to make the principalship attractive. Strategies for making the position better include better pay, job description revision, redefinition of duty, district support, and the power to make change. (Contains 20 references.) (MLF)

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ED 452 613

Running head: PRINCIPAL SHORTAGE

Solutions to Securing Qualified Principals

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May 2001

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Abstract

There are about 80,000 public school principals in the United States today. The Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) (2001) estimates a 10% employment increase in educational administration jobs between now and 2008. Most job openings, particularly for principals, will come from the need to replace people who retire. Among K-8 principals alone, the National Association of Elementary School Principals (NAESP) estimates that more than 40% will retire or leave in the next 10 years (Olson, 1999). Numerous articles and studies written on the principal shortage conclude that qualified, experienced principals are getting harder to find, regardless of district quality, pay incentives, location or size (McKay, 2000; Natt, 1999). Nearly 50% of the U. S. school districts report having difficulty attracting applicants to fill positions (Sinatra, 2000). Not many people apply for principalships and those that do lack the experience. The turnover rate for principals is in the 40% range. High turnover rates create opportunities for new, energetic principals, but new means inexperienced. Few veteran principals are available (Harmel, 1000). Is retirement the main reason principals are leaving the profession or are there additional concerns? What are districts doing about the current and looming shortages?

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Solutions to Securing Qualified Principals

The Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) projects that approximately 40% of the 93,200 principals will retire in the next 10 years. Principal vacancies are expected to rise from 10% to 20% through 2006 (Coeyman, 2000; Keller, 1998; Olson, 1999).

Qualified, experienced principals are getting harder to find regardless of district qualities, pay incentives, location or size (McKay, 2000; Natt, 1999). Nearly 50% of the U. S. school districts are having problems finding principa candidates (Sinatra, 2000). The shortage in each level of K-12 education is 55% for high school, 55% for middle school and 47% for elementary schools (Perlstein, 1999). Some districts are leaving job postings open months after closing dates (Natt, 1999).

Between 1988 and 1998, there was a 40% turnover rate for principals. High turnover rates bring in new principals that are energetic, but lack experience in managing schools (Harmel, 2000). In addition, the quality of principal applicants has declined (Pugmire, 1999). In a recent report published by the National Association of Secondary School Principals (NASSP) and (NAESP) about the principal shortage, findings revealed that principal shortages are eroding district efforts to improve student performance.

Reasons for Shortages

In a meta-analysis of articles on the principal shortage, six main reasons emerged for lack of interest in the position of principal:

1. The principalship does not pay enough. Experienced teachers may make as much as the principal (Brockett, 1999; Coeyman, 2000; Keller, 1998; Lord, 2000; McKay, 1999; NAESP & NASSP, 2000; Olson, 1999; Sinatra, 2000).
2. The job requires too much time. Principals work an average of 54 hours a week. Principals work a full day and then must attend many late afternoon and weekend events (Brockett, 1999; Joerger, 2000; Lord, 2000; McKay, 1999; NAESP & NASSP, 2000; Nakamura & Samuels, 2000; Perlstein, 1999; Pugmire, 1999; Sinatra, 2000).

   Approximately 47% of the nation's teachers have master's degrees, but few want to be principals due to the amount of time required of the principal position (McKay, 1999; Smith, 1999). Most eligible candidates would rather stay in the classroom, work 10 months instead of 12 months, and go home after work, instead of staying after hours for athletic or fine arts events (NAESP & NASSP, 2000; Smith, 1999).
3. Principals are held accountable for test scores that link the principal job with student achievement (Blackman & Fenwick, 2000; Coeyman, 2000; NAESP & NASSP, 2000; Nakamura & Samuels, 2000; Perlstein, 1999; Sinatra, 2000). Principals have little control over the hiring and firing process, yet are accountable for teacher performance.

Principals unable to bring schools above an "F" rating in two or three years often lose their jobs (Pugmire, 1999).

4. The position comes with accountability for solving social problems, such as decaying family structures and school violence, both of which are out of the control of the principal (Erlandson, 2000; Joerger, 2000; Sinatra, 2000; Smith, 1999).
5. Principals receive little or no support from the central office. They feel alone and unappreciated (Nakamura & Samuels, 2000; Natt, 1999; McKay, 1999; Olson, 1999; Sinatra, 2000). Principals are expected to take responsibility for numerous duties, such as teacher supervisor, disciplinarian, counselor, motivator, fiscal agent, fundraiser and social worker (Coeyman, 2000; Joerger, 2000; McKay, 1999; NAESP & NASSP, 2000; Olson, 1999; Pugmire, 1999; Sinatra, 2000).

Solutions

The principal shortage compels districts to look for solutions. Fifteen solutions revealed by the literature follow.

1. A few districts are using head hunters to find principals (Brockett, 1999).
2. Principal vacancies are being advertised nationwide via internet (Brockett, 1999; Olson, 1999).
3. Some districts employee retired principals (Natt, 1999).

4. Districts are providing bonuses and incentives to principal candidates (Joerger, 2000; Olson, 1999).
5. Universities are providing continuing education courses close to home (Everett, 1998).
6. Some universities provide educational administration degrees on line (Everett, 1998).
7. Fourteen states have alternative routes to the principalship (Lord, 2000).
8. Approximately one-fourth of districts have developed grow-your-own programs (Adams, 1999; Brockett, 1999; Henry, 2000; NAESP & NASSP, 2000). In New Jersey, principals identify teachers for administration. Candidates attend a two-day program designed to familiarize them with the various aspects of the principalship. Participants submit resumes for review and are provided with information on how to get a job (Brockett, 1999; McKay, 1999; Pugmire, 1999). Minnesota has a similar program for recruiting talented teachers for administration. Recruits participate in a series of five workshops throughout the year (Pugmire, 1999). Philadelphia provides candidates with a program that includes two, six-week internships under exemplary principals; an applied research requirement; and an assessment of candidate leadership skills. The district has also invites assistant principals to participate in an

assessment center. Participants are given individual help in passing the written and oral exams required of school leaders. The program also provides monthly seminars for new principals (Olson, 1999). Toledo Public Schools designed an Urban Leadership Development Program for mentoring potential principals (Hinton & Kasnter, 2000). Los Angeles Unified School District has a New Principal Academy. All new principals are required to attend the 18-month program in which principals meet ½ day twice a month for formalized instruction. The program also provides principal mentors, networking opportunities and forums for sharing problems and solutions.

9. Districts have developed shadowing programs in which principal candidates shadow an experienced principal for six weeks (Adams, 1999; Lord, 2000).
10. Some universities have developed their own programs. Harvard University has a Principals Center that is grooms candidates and provides programs to retain newly hired principals (Hinton & Kasnter, 2000).
11. Collaborations between universities and districts and sometimes administration organizations are being developed (Adams, 1999; Coeyman, 2000;Natt, 1999). The National Council for the Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE), the Interstate School Leaders Licensure Consortium (ISLLC) and the educational

administration faculty at the University of Southern Mississippi created a cohort program for aspiring principals. The cohort program allows aspiring administrators to work through graduate studies in educational administration with a group. Participants develop mentoring relationships with the university educational administration faculty and network with one another. In Rochester, New York, the public school system and Saint John Fisher College have created a program tailored to fit the schedule of teachers. The program provides Friday and Saturday sessions over three semesters and one summer. Participants that pass the screening procedures for program inclusion receive a 60% reduction in tuition costs. In return, participants are asked to work in Rochester for at least five years. The program provides on-the-job training and courses in public relations, school law, budgeting and finance. Training is customized to district size and location (Coeyman, 2000.

12. Districts and universities are forming collaboratives. Old Dominion University and Norfolk Public Schools has a program called Principal Leadership for Urban Schools. Candidates are given opportunities to gain on-the-job experiences specific to situations and problems occurring in school districts (Hinton & Kasnter, 2000).

The University of Las Vegas and the Clark County

School districts have training programs that allow participants to apply for district positions upon completion (Hinton & Kasnter, 2000).

13. Some universities are now requiring year-long field-based internships. The school district and the college faculty work as a team.
14. Organizations are designing programs. NAESP support a National Principal's Academy (Hinton & Kasnter, 2000).
15. State departments are designing programs. The Mississippi State Department of Education is offering up to 30 paid yearlong sabbaticals to allow aspiring principals to attend graduate school and prepare for leadership roles (Sutley, 1999).

In Oklahoma, anyone with a master's degree and a passing score on the state certification exam can be a principal (Lord, 2000).

The Ohio Principal Leadership Academy focuses on needs across the state. The academy began operations in the spring under the direction of Joseph Murphy, an expert in educational leadership (Henry, 2000).

Though districts, states, organizations and universities have developed some promising programs, the urgency of the principal shortage requires immediate recruitment efforts (Smith, 1999).

Suggestions for Making the Job Better

The most obvious solution to the principal shortage is to pay principals better, but there are other strategies districts might pursue (Joerger, 2000) including the following:

1. Make the job more manageable. Put central office administrators on campuses to assist the principal (Adams, 1999; Erlandson, 2000; Perlstein, 1999).
2. Change the job description for principal (Joerger, 2000). Assign extracurricular activities to other administrators. Assistant principals can be hired to monitor student activities at night and on weekends, allowing the lead principal some time for rest and family (Adams, 1999; Olson, 1999).
3. Allow principals to hire and fire teachers. Principals must be given the power to dismiss poor teachers, if the school system is expected to raise student achievement.
4. Give principals job security (Natt, 1999). A three-year contract would at least give principals time to make needed changes to increase student achievement.
5. Provide principals with mentors (Joerger, 2000).
6. Give the principal some expert assistance in meeting the needs of students with limited English proficiency.

7. Provide principals with counselors and social workers to help students with non-academic needs (Olson, 1999).
8. Provide professional development for the principal and the school staff in curriculum and instruction improvement, cultural diversity, school safe, technology use, and group dynamics (Erlandson, 2000; Hinton & Kasnter, 2000).

Summary

The principal shortage is critical. To find ways to reduce shortages districts are providing incentives, developing principal programs, and using new methods of recruiting, such as the world wide web.

Although many of the strategies districts, universities, and organizations are using help reduce principal shortage concerns such as inadequate pay, too many hours on the job, high expectations coupled with numerous job duties, and inadequate job security continue to be reasons for limited applicants.

To encourage principal applicants districts, universities, and organizations must work to make the principalship attractive. Strategies for making the position better include better pay, job description revision, redefinition of duty, district support, and the power to make change.

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